

France Seeking Extradition of Nazi

By Jonathan C. Randal
Washington Post Foreign Service

PARIS, Feb. 9.—Thanks to the relentless prodding of a German woman born just before World War II, France has resumed efforts to extradite and try Klaus Barbie, the dreaded Gestapo chief in occupied Lyons.

Twice condemned to death in absentia by French courts for his wartime activities, which cost the lives of thousands of French Jews and underground leader Jean Moulin, Barbie disappeared from Germany when the West German government decided not to apply the statute of limitations to war crimes.

The French government has begun fresh extradition proceedings against Barbie charging that under the alias of Klaus Altmann the "butcher of Lyons" acquired Bolivian nationality under false pretenses.

While in Peru recently, Altmann was warned of the extradition proceedings. He fled to Bolivia, which, unlike Peru, does not have a normal extradition treaty with France and prosecutes no crimes going back more than 20 years.

TV Interview

Interviewed on French television last night, Altmann first claimed he knew no French but nonetheless later made it clear, that he understood the language—and, indeed, spoke it almost without accent. Despite his denials, there is a troubling coincidence between the birth dates of Barbie and Altmann and between those of their wives and children.

Yet, three men and a woman who were personally tortured by Barbie during the occupation were almost reluctant to say straight out that Altmann was in fact their torturer.

Despite their quasi-certainty, their reticence was summed up by one of Barbie's victims who said, "before a court of law I would have to say that I did not recognize him."

Altmann, who seemed on television a beaten man, is currently being held in Bolivia on a fraud charge. This should keep him in custody until it can be established whether he really is Barbie. If France can prove that he is he would be liable for extradition for having lied when applying for Bolivian citizenship.

No matter what the outcome, the search for Barbie

would never have been prosecuted with such vigor were it not for Beate Klarsfeld, a 32-year-old German woman. Daughter of a Protestant working-class family in Berlin, who married Serge Klarsfeld, a French Jew whose father died in Auschwitz.

Slapped Kiesinger

By 1937 she had made a name for herself by attacking West Germany's then-Chancellor Kurt-George Kiesinger for his role before and during the war.

The following year she kept a promise and slapped him in the face during a Christian Democratic political conference in Berlin—and was sentenced to a year in jail, later reduced to four months.

Although praised in Eastern

Europe for her anti-Nazi vendetta, in 1970 she was held by Warsaw police after chaining herself to a tree and distributing pamphlets denouncing Polish anti-Semitism.

In 1970 she led the successful campaign which discouraged the German government from naming Ernst Achenbach, a German diplomat in wartime Paris, as a Common Market commissioner.

With the help of her husband, she has compiled a list of some 1,000 German war criminals who have eluded prosecution although condemned in absentia by French courts.

"By herself," said French philosopher Vladimir Jankélévitch, "she is the conscience of a country which remains unconscious of its acts."

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215